COMIC SHOP NEWS™

278

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Scarlett: A Story With Bite

Vampires are far from dead right now—in fact, it appears that there's a vampiric renaissance going on unlike any ever before seen in the mass media. Vampires are starring in novels, films, and comic books galore from a variety of companies—and, beginning late this year, the DC Universe will be the latest realm to be inhabited by the undead. Of course, if the DC Universe is going to have vampires, then it'll have to have vampire fighters...which is exactly where ***Scarlett*** fits into the picture.

Scarlett is the story of a vampire hunter—or to be more precise, a vampire hunting team. The team is led by Bly Pharis, a teenager whose life is turned upside down by the murder of her parents. The police suspect Bly of the killing...but Bly knows that the murderers are actually a gang of vampire bikers. Since undead murderers don't exactly fit into the standard list of police suspects, it's up to Bly to track them down—which she does in her new guise as the Scarlett Redeemer...a guise that is given birth by the bite of a vampire. Before long, she is joined by a pair of powerful vampire hunters,

and the trio set out to protect the world from a menace that it doesn't even suspect.

Scarlett may not seem to have much of a Batman connection—in fact, it seems to owe more to ***Lost Boys, Dracula,*** and ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer*** than it does to Batman. Nevertheless, fans will have their first opportunity to meet the vampires who are Scarlett's sworn enemies in the pages of ***Legends of the Dark Knight #41***, where Batman confronts the vampires in an abandoned movie studio. This story is written by Tom Joyner and K.S. Wilson and is illustrated by Jim Fern—the same team responsible for the ongoing ***Scarlett*** series.

While vampires play an integral role in Scarlett, fans shouldn't think of the series as a simple horror tale. ***Scarlett*** is an amalgam of horror and superheroics, intended for fans of both genres.

Scarlett #1, a $2.95 48-page special premiere issue, is scheduled for December 10th release; subsequent issues are priced at $1.75. ***Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight #41,*** a special single-issue tie-in, is scheduled for November 26th release.

by Kim B. Pearson

Topps' Dracula Captures Grave Tone of Coppola Film

"Faithfulness" seems to be key word insofar as ***Bram Stoker's Dracula*** is concerned. Screenwriter James Hart is already being praised by critics for the faithfulness of his screen adaptation of Stoker's novel—and Roy Thomas, the writer of the comic book series, is remaining just as faithful to Hart's script as he adapts the story into comic form.

"The screenplay was a faithful, modern rendition of the book; and it was a very good script in itself," Thomas said. "The narration, for instance, is done in terms of diaries and journal entries exactly the way the book had them."

Thomas also praised the film's artistic quality—a quality that was often easily adaptable into comics form. According to Thomas, ***Dracula*** "took a very visual, very artful—as opposed to artsy—approach to the material. I liked the segues—for instance, when you focus in on an eye and it dissolves into another scene, or a pool of blood becomes water, and the eye of a peacock feather becomes the focus of a transition scene. While not all of the segues could be done in a comic, I appreciated the fact that you could see this movie in your head as being a very artful project."

In most adaptations, the comic book creative team doesn't have sufficient space in which to capture the little touches that characterize the film. In the case of Topps' ***Dracula,*** however, an editorial decision was made to adapt the film in a four-issue limited series instead of a 48 or 64-page oneshot. "I wanted to duplicate the movie-going experience to the best of my ability," Thomas said. "I knew that we needed at least a hundred pages in order to do that, and I'm delighted that the decision was made to increase it to a four-issue adaptation."

Screenwriter James V. Hart worked as a consultant on the comic book adaptation, making himself available for any questions that might arise. "I feel I've had the best of both worlds," Hart said. "To be able to work with such benchmark legendary figures as director Francis Ford Coppola on the movie and writer Roy Thomas and artist Mike Mignola on the Topps Comics' adaptation is very rewarding."

Hart made several suggestions to make the transition of his story from film to comics more successful. "Instead of ending the first issue with Jonathan Harker in the castle, lying on the floor after his encounter with Dracula and the three women vampires as I was originally intending," Thomas said, "Jim Hart's suggestion was to end the issue with a shot of Harker's fiancee, Mina, and of the letter Harker had written to her, telling her that all was well. I was very happy with the suggestion..."

Jim Salicrup, editor-in-chief of the Topps Comics line, said that the ***Dracula*** adaptation was an exceptional case in a field in which most adaptations are plagued by continual miscommunications and arbitrary demands for changes. "Movie adaptation comics can be very difficult, but it appears that this one is an exception," Salicrup said. "The respect between the comics and movie creators is mutual, which paves the way for ideal work conditions."

The mutual respect that Sallicrup refers to made it possible for Mike Mignola, artist of the adaptation, to contribute to some of the set designs. The filmmakers were so pleased with Mignola's rendition of Dracula's castle that they used his art as design illustrations. American Zoetrope/Osiris Films, Dracula's production company, also gave Mignola virtually unlimited access to the film's design art, costume illustrations, and any other visuals necessary to help him in illustrating the comic adaptation.

Topps is including four exclusive ***Dracula Trading Cards*** with each polybagged issue of ***Bram Stoker's Dracula***. While some of those cards will feature photos from the film and Mignola artwork from the comics, four special cards will feature portraits (one of Anthony Hopkins as Van Helsing and three of Gary Oldman as Dracula) by Mark Chiarello. Chiarello, who illustrated Eclipse's ***Stars of the Negro League Trading Cards*** and is also the colorist of the ***Dracula*** adaptation at the specific request of Mike Mignola ("Mike and I are good friends, and we work together very well,"Chiarello said), chose to illustrate Dracula as a warrior nobleman, an ancient vampire, and a fashionable, malevolent lord. "What was really interesting about these three cards is that they're all of the same actor, Gary Oldman, in different make-up," Chiarello said. "It's neat to be able to paint the same person in different ages."

Painter John Nyberg has also illustrated four cards for the limited edition series. Two of Nyberg's cards feature Dracula metamorphosed into a bat and a wolf; the third features Dracula's sepulchral brides; and the fourth features Lucy in her vampiric form.

The exclusive ***Dracula Trading Card*** subset is intended as a special supplement to Topps' Dracula Trading Card series. This 100-card set will feature high-quality full-color photographs from the movie as well as Mignola/Nyberg art from the adaptation. Each card will feature red foil stamping. The ***Dracula Trading Cards,*** priced at $1.25 per pack, are scheduled for release in mid-November in conjunction with the film.

Bram Stoker's Dracula #1, a $2.95 polybagged comic, is scheduled for late October release. (Topps is also offering a special crimson-foil-embossed limited edition of each issue of ***Dracula #1;*** stores will receive a very limited number of copies of this edition. Topps is also conducting a drawing in which five hundred lucky fans will win a copy of the foil-stamped limited edition.)

(**CSN's Give and Take**, featured inside this issue, offers a review of ***Bram Stoker's Dracula,*** along with selected artwork from the first issue of the series.)

by Cliff Biggers

COMIC SHOP NEWS™
10 • 21 • 92
From Your Friendly Neighborhood Comics Outlet
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Shedding Light On DarkUrthe

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It's a comic! It's a game! It's both!

DarkUrthe Legends, a new title debuting late this month, is more than just a fantasy comic book; according to *Matthew Yarro* of DarkUrthe, "**DarkUrthe Legends** is split into two parts: a monthly comic book and a fantasy role-playing game. People who enjoy comics and the fantasy/swords and sorcery genre will enjoy **DarkUrthe Legends**; however, for those who enjoy comics and fantasy role-playing games, there is an added bonus. **DarkUrthe Legends** monthly is an interactive comic—this means that our readers can send us ideas for monsters, magic, and much more; we will select the best ideas and plug them directly into the comic's illustrated stories, short stories, and articles."

While **DarkUrthe Legends** can be utilized with other games, it is designed to work best in conjunction with the **DarkUrthe Legends Fantasy Role-Playing Game.** Of course, if you're not as interested in the gaming segment of the book as you are in the comic book, none of that will matter. **DarkUrthe Legends #1,** a full-color comic with a heavy cardstock cover, is priced at $2.50.

I Spy Comics

Spy Magazine, well known for its political and social commentary with a sharp edge, ventures into the world of comics this month with the inclusion of **Fantastic Foursome #4** polybagged with the October issue of **Spy.** This comic features the superheroic adventures of the Clintons and the Gores as they travel the country disguised as a MOR rock band, the New Covenant. Along the way, they encounter their arch-enemy the Changeling (George Bush) and his villainous accomplices. A small bat-like creature (Ross Perot even makes a brief appearance.

"We feel this is the next big superhero team," Spy editor *Kurt Andersen* said. "Unless they lose, in which case they'll be another quickly forgotten one-shot... We did a Kennedy Babies comic last year at this time and got a tremendous response. We're also very happy with the way this one came out. We're building a **Spy** universe, slowly but surely." The Fantastic Foursome is written by *Larry Doyle* and illustrated by *Alan Kupperberg*.

Russian Novelist Cards?...

No, the **Crime and Punishment Cards** from Eclipse don't retell the story of Dostoevsky's famous novel. Instead, they retell the stories of ten criminal trials that will be remembered forever in criminal history—including the trials of *Charles Manson, Sirhan Sirhan, Wayne Williams,* and *Patty Hearst.* The art for this 110-card series is supplied by ABC-TV courtroom sketch artist *Bill Lignanti,* who is supplementing his courtroom sketches with original pieces done especially for this series; the card-back commentary is supplied by television newsman *Bruce Carroll.* Each12-card pack is priced at $1.25; **Crime and Punishment Cards** are scheduled for November release.

Vampirella's Adventures Get More Colorful

Thus far, the new adventures of Vampirella (published by Harris Comics) have been presented in black and white; when Vampirella returns this November in her own ongoing monthly series, though, the very colorful character will appear in a multi-hued format. **Vampirella #1** kicks off a multi-part storyline by *Kurt Busiek* and *Louis Small, Jr.*, that takes Vampi to Europe to confront Dracula, Lord of Vampires. The covers for each issue are supplied by fan-fave *Adam Hughes*; each issue will also feature a special certificate that can be redeemed for a special limited edition *Dave Stevens* poster of Vampirella. **Vampirella #1** is priced at $2.95.

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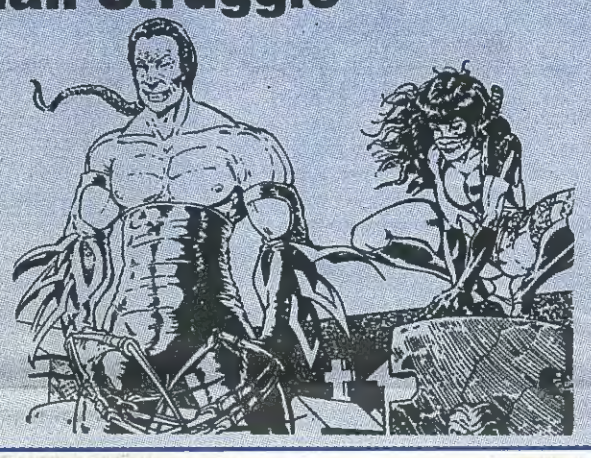
Thor Undergoes Mallet-justment

For the past few years now, **Thor**'s creative team has been *Tom DeFalco* and *Ron Frenz*; that's changing early next year, though, when the book passes into the capable hands of writer *Jim Starlin* and penciller *Bruce Zick*, whose work has been wowing fans of the gothic sf/fantasy **Zone Continuum**. According to Zick, "We're really excited about bringing back the grandeur of the glory years of Thor while providing a new and fresh vision to the saga." Zick isn't twiddling his thumbs in the meantime; in addition to **Zone Continuum** from Caliber Press, he's also working on a three-part series entitled **Terminal Point** for Dark Horse; after that, he launched a new miniseries, **The Peculiar Adventures of Norman Van Nostrumm**.

A Tooth-and-Nail Struggle

In early 1993, Caliber's Gauntlet Comics imprint will offer a new **Tooth and Nail** ongoing series starring characters who were originally introduced in the pages of **Cat & Mouse.** Since a lot of fans might not have seen the original appearances of Tooth and Nail, Caliber is reintroducing them to fans in a ninety-six-page eponymously entitled collection reprinting **Cat & Mouse** #s 9-12. The Yakuza duo will be part of a major Gauntlet Comics crossover event in '93, so fans who haven't met 'em before will want to get to know this duo in this affordable $6.95 trade paperback.



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Meugniot Turns Exotic

Will Meugniot has been involved in a number of comic books over the years, including his co-creation **The DNAgents** and his exclusive creation **Vanity.** His work in the comics field has been less prevalent recently, though—but that's not because he's lost an interest in comics. Meugniot has been involved in the X-Men pilot and the new Fox-TV **X-Men** series. This doesn't mean that you'll have to get by without enjoying Meugniot's illustrative abilities, though...

Exotic Fantasy, a three-issue limited series from Fantagraphics' Eros Comics, offers hundreds of previously unpublished Meugniot good-girl drawings; while the book does feature some nudity, Meugniot assures fans that the adult content stops there. "There are no sexually explicit scenes in **Exotic Fantasy**," Meugniot said. "The only reason for the self-imposed Adults Only label is, being a sketchbook, it contains a lot of pure figure drawings." **Exotic Fantasy** offers original development drawings for **Vanity** and **DNAgents** as well as a sneak peek at *Mark Evanier* and Will Meugniot's new **DNAgents** series.

Exotic Fantasy #1, a $2.95 comic, is scheduled for early November release.

Comic Museum News

Since you're reading this issue of **Comic Shop News,** the odds are you're already an aficionado of the genre; to a lot of people, though, comics remain a cheap form of entertainment rather than an art form. That's where *Kevin Eastman*, co-creator of **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles,** hopes to change public perceptions; he is the driving force behind **Words and Pictures,** the first museum devoted to "contemporary" works of comics art from the 1970's, 1980's, and 1990's. The museum opens in Northampton, Massachussets, in mid-October with an opening show featuring the art of *Michael Ploog, Jack Kirby, Bill Sienkiewicz, Paul Mavrides, Gilbert Shelton, John Severin, Mark Martin,* and *Wally Wood.* Eastman has permanently loaned his 7000-item original art collection to the museum to help it start with a bang; "I am endorsing the museum for the plain and simple fact that I believe comic book illustration—graphic narrative—the combination of words and pictures in a sequential form equals art."

If At First You Don't Succeed, Try Out, Try Out Again

A few years ago, **Marvel's Try-Out Book** competition offered everyone a chance to become a member of the Marvel bullpen; the competition elicited thousands of responses, and one of its winners—*Mark Bagley*— went on to become the fan-favorite illustrator of **Amazing Spider-Man**. With all the attention focused on the competition, though, a lot of people overlooked the fact that—competition or not—the try-out book was a great tool for teaching new fans the basics of comic book creation.

Later this year, Marvel will offer a new generation of comic-creator-wannabees a chance to learn the basics when they reprint the **Marvel Comics Try-Out Book**. This giant-sized 32-page book, printed on high quality bristol illustration board, teaches readers how to break into the comics industry and offers a comprehensive listing of the proper materials, formats, etc., for preparing submissions. The **Marvel Try-Out Book**, a December 10th release, is priced at $19.95.

Jab Takes Aim On Cover Enhancements

You've seen glow-in-the-dark covers, metallic ink covers, foil-enhanced covers, die-cut covers...but have you ever seen a comic book cover with a bullet-hole in it? Oh, sure, we've all felt like shooting a comic book that particularly aggravated us—but in the case of **Jab #3,** the bullet hole is intentionally added to the book by the publisher, Adhesive Comics. Since fans seem to love special cover enhancements, Adhesive will fire a bullet through every single copy of **Jab #3** (yes, that means that there will be *no* mint copies of the book). Additionally, every tenth copy of the comic will feature powder burns on the cover.

Of course, it's what's inside the book that will determine if it's enjoyable or not—and the gang at Adhesive Comics has filled **Jab #3** with an assortment of comics material to appeal to every taste. The lead feature stars the ultimate superhero, Too Much Coffee Man, created by '92 Harvey Award nominee *Shannon Wheeler*; other features include Teen Squad by *Tom King* and SplitPhaze by *Ashley Underwood. Rob Bostick, Wyle Akins, Lance Myer, Jason Storey,* and *Mitchelle Crisp* also contribute to the book. **Jab #3**, a $2.50 comic, is scheduled for December release.

Weyr, Oh Weyr Is the Paperback?...

Dragonflight, the miniseries by *Brynne Stephens, Lela Dowling, Cynthia Martin,* and *Fred Von Tobel,* is the first (and thus far, the only) comics adaptation of *Anne McCaffrey*'s famous Dragon series. As you might expect, the original issues of this limited series are sold out from their publisher, Eclipse—but their contents will soon be available in an affordable trade paperback. **Dragonflight,** a $14.95 book, features a new painted cover by *Mark Ferrari*. For fans who want an even more permanent edition, Eclipse is also releasing a $34.95 **Dragonflight** hardcover; as with all specialty items of this sort, be sure to let the friendly folks at your local comic shop know that you're interested...and tell 'em that **CSN** sent you, okay?...

Blood Flows In November

The late 19th Century gave us two of the most famous bloodthirsty villains in history, one fictional and one all too real. In the early 1890's, Whitechapel was terrorized by Jack the Ripper; a few years later, the literary world was terrorized by Bram Stoker's Dracula.

In 1985, *Ricky Shanklin, Mark Wheatley,* and *Mark Hempel* brought these two characters together in a four-issue miniseries, Blood of the Innocent. This series has always been ranked as one of the highest quality modern tales of Dracula or of Jack the Ripper—but until now, the only way to enjoy it was to track it down in back-issue boxes.

In November, Apple Comics will make it possible for every fan to enjoy this acclaimed story when it releases **Blood of the Innocent**, a $12.95 trade paperback reprinting the entire full-color limited series. Additionally, Apple is including the epilog to the story, previously available only in **WaRP Graphics Annual.** With interest in Dracula running very high because of the upcoming Francis Ford Coppola film, don't look for this trade paperback to sit on the shelves for very long!...

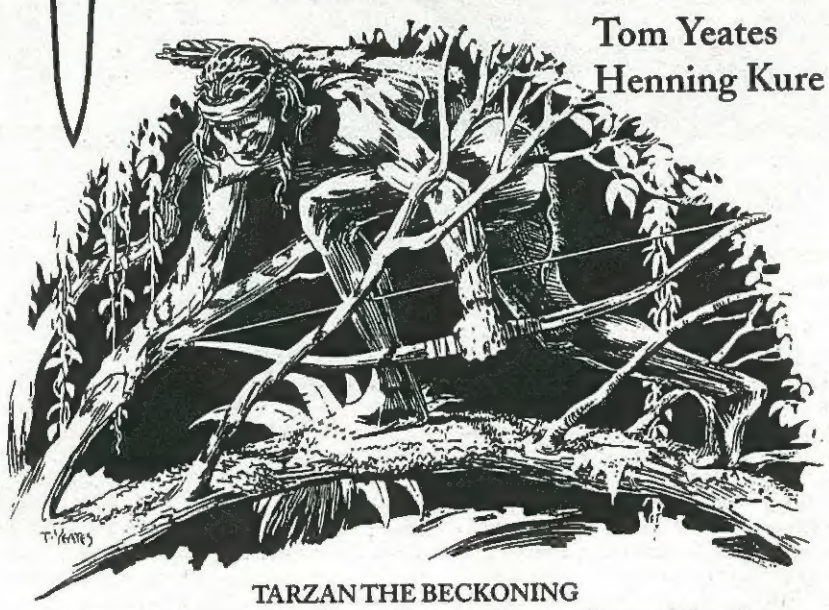
X Marks the Spot

The most popular feature ever presented in **Marvel Comics Presents** was *Barry Windsor-Smith*'s **Weapon X** serial that ran in **MCP** #s 72-84. The storyline offered a great deal of insight into the origins and background of Wolverine; since its publication, it has served as the basis for several different Wolverine stories by other creators. In December, Marvel is gathering all thirteen parts of the **Weapon X** serial into one 128-page hardcover. **Weapon X**, a $19.95 hardcover, is scheduled for December 3rd release, making it a perfect gift item for the Wolverine fan on a budget.

Haunt For the Holidays

Jack would really like to have a happy holiday... if only a demon, the Yattering, wasn't determined to drive him insane. That's the problem that Jack must overcome in **The Yattering and Jack,** a *Clive Barker* story adapted to comics by *Steve Niles* and *John Bolton*. Eclipse released the adaptation in hardcover in time for the holiday season last year; this year, they're offering the book to fans in three different formats. There's an $8.95 trade paperback and a $22.95 hardcover—and for fans who prefer more lavish collectibles, there's also a signed and numbered limited edition featuring an extra tip-in-plate by Bolton (inquire with the folks at your local comic shop about price on this collectible—and let 'em know that you heard about it in **CSN**).

Edgar Rice Burroughs
TARZAN® The Beckoning
Tom Yeates
Henning Kure



TARZAN THE BECKONING
The New 7-Issue Full Color Tarzan Series By Henning Kure and Tom Yeates

Tarzan and Jane are up against the illegal ivory trade, smugglers and poachers, a hired assassin and the authentic African trickster god--The Spider Man!

Debuting In November From Malibu Comics

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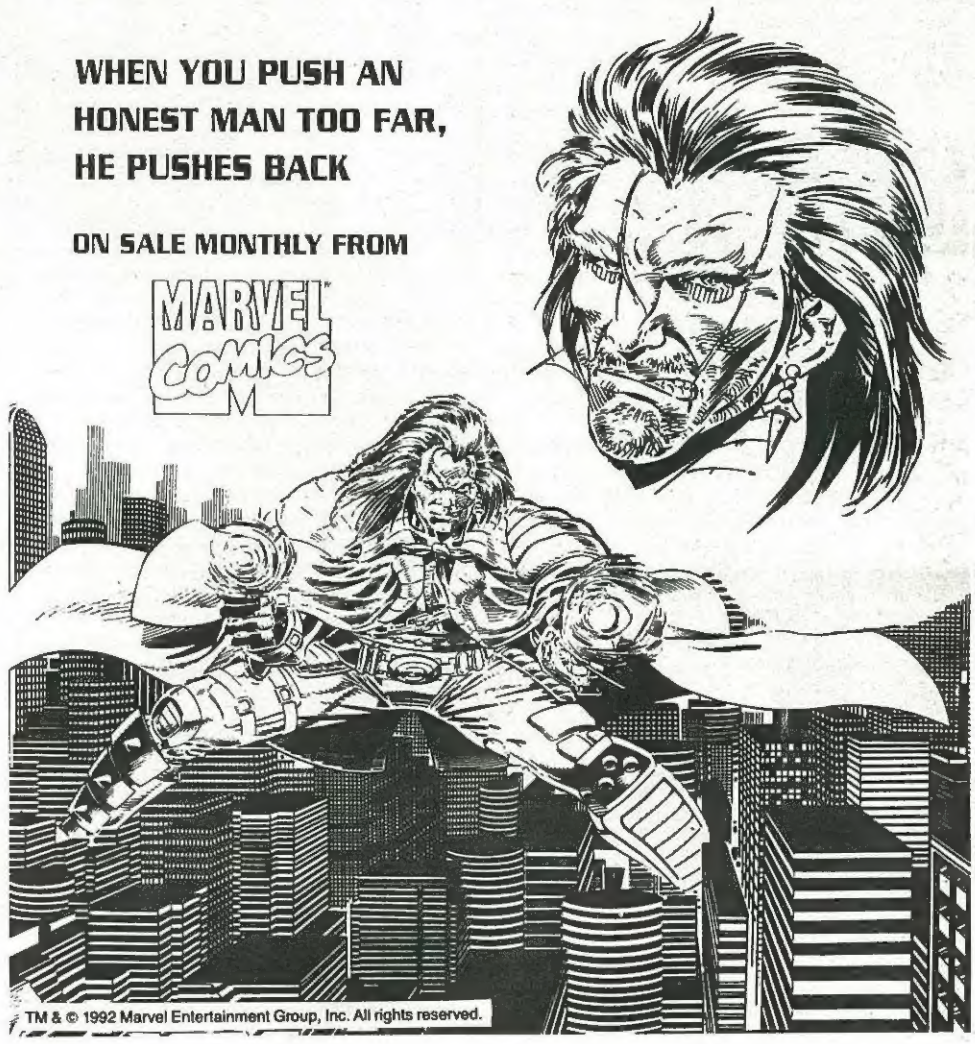

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Give & Take by Cliff Biggers & Brett Brooks

Each month, Cliff Biggers (in plain type) and *Brett Brooks (in italic type)* take a look at a few choice comics scheduled for release in the next few weeks. Publishers interested in having their books considered for review should send copies to ***CSN Give & Take, 2339 Milstead Circle, Marietta GA 30066.*** We'd prefer receiving copies of the books at least thirty days before they're scheduled to reach comic shops. Enough business–now let's talk comics...

Ever since they killed him off a few years back, Robin has been one of DC's most popular characters. That might sound a little odd, but it's basically true; of course, it helps that Chuck Dixon and Tom Lyle have been turning out dynamic mini-series for the past three years.

Robin III: Cry of the Huntress *is the third in a series of tales featuring the character that many have previously thought of as Batman's annoying sidekick. Times have changed, though, and now Robin is proving to have a popularity of his own that rivals that of the Dark Knight. The team of Chuck Dixon and Tom Lyle are once again responsible for bringing back this teen sensation, and a couple of other characters familiar to Batman fans as well.*

Maybe it's only the odd-numbered Robins who are popular...

As the title suggests, this mini-series doesn't just feature Robin, but also the Huntress. It's refreshing to see the Huntress back in comics again; I have always been a fan of the character, and even stuck with her when the stories weren't so good—and my patience has paid off.

Dixon seems to have a real talent for portraying characters in a very natural way—especially characters who aren't truly super-powered. This may be why he has been so successful with Batman and in the Robin mini-series for the past couple of years. Dixon portrays Robin as a teenager, with all of the quirks, and problems, and inconsistencies that really exist—which is why it works. His portrayal of the Huntress meshes perfectly with Robin; she is very brash and sure of herself, yet still suffering from the shortcomings of being very new to this game (as superheroing is measured). The two characters seem to have a common base as underlings of Batman, trying to step from his shadow without leaving his tutorial light.

You're right in that regard: Batman has never been further in the background in a Robin story than he is in this one. Dixon is quite capable of transforming both Robin and the Huntress into independent characters. Since, toward the end of her post-Crisis career, the Huntress has been little more than a costume wandering through comic book adventures, it's a nice change.

The structure of the story is very much a clash of cultures. One of the best and most distinct clashes is the time-honored generation gap; Tim Drake is a teenager whose father is concerned about his well-being, perhaps to the point of being over-protective. Tim wants to respect his father's wishes, but cannot turn away from his responsibilities as Robin, so a conflict ensues—primarily internalized in the mind of Tim Drake.

This is as an almost quintessential teenage comic book story; Dixon is doing here what Stan Lee did in those early Spider-Man stories...and it works quite well.

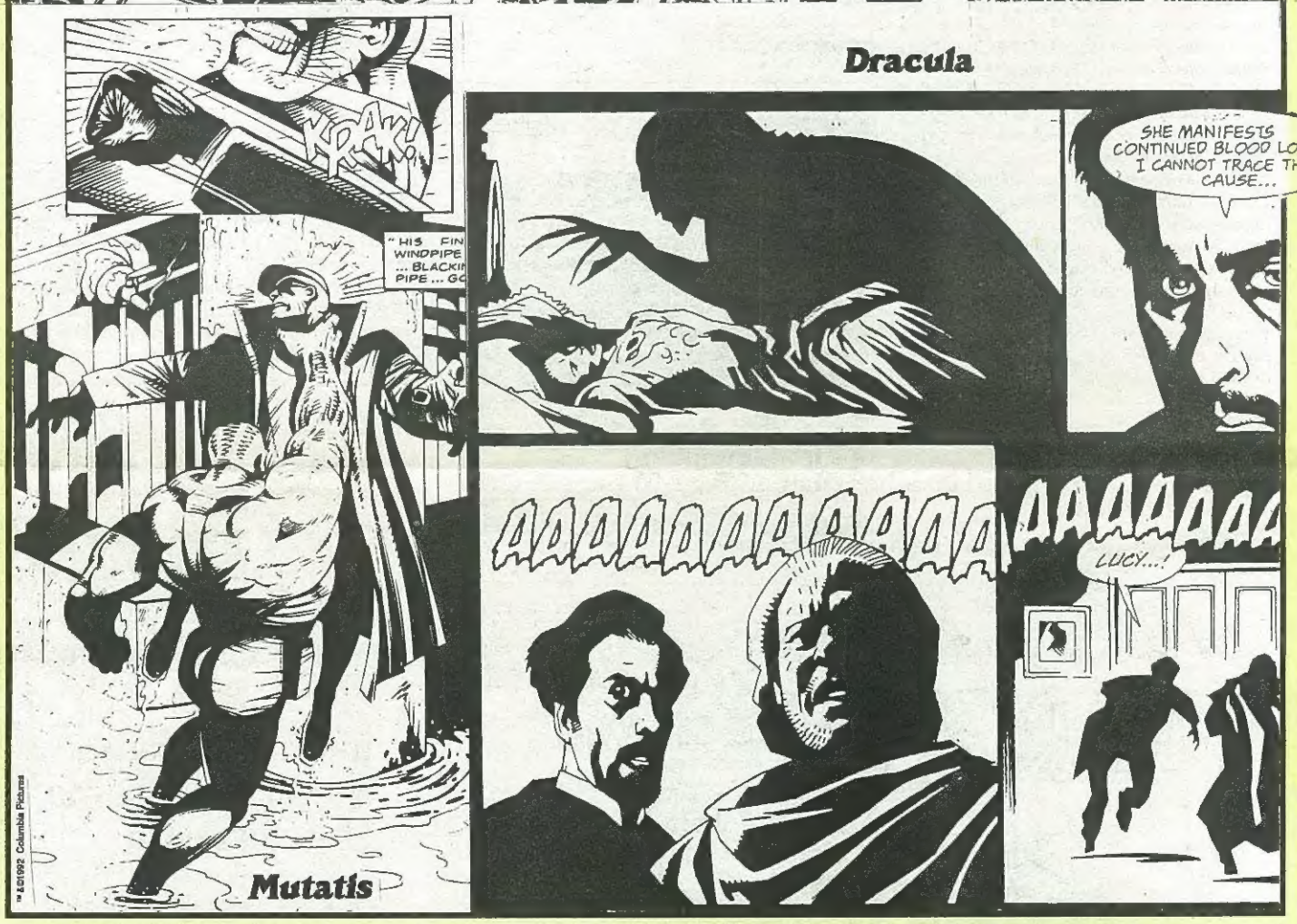
Cry of the Huntress *is based in and around the Russian ghetto of Gotham City, which leads to differences in view between Robin and those that he is trying to protect, not to mention the appearance of the second character that is reintroduced in this story—the KG-Beast, from the spectacular* ***Ten Nights of the Beast*** *storyline. The very prevalent Italian background of the Huntress also serves as seasoning for the adventure. There is also going to be a reappearance of the King Snake and his lovely band of fugitives before the whole thing is done.*

If you get the idea that there is a lot happening in this story, then you're right—but the best part of the whole thing is that it doesn't seem ponderous. Dixon has managed to mesh all of these aspects of the story together in a very natural and flowing manner that never annoys or detracts from the remainder of the book.

The art by Tom Lyle and Bob Smith is, of course, outstanding. Lyle has become very associated with the look of the Robin mini-series, and I feel that the overall success of the book would be less if he were not along for the ride once again. Every time I see Lyle's work, it just seems to get a little better. Now if we can just get him back on ***Detective*** *when this thing is done...*

I'd be willing to accept another artist on ***Detective...*** *if* Tom Lyle went on to become the artist on an ongoing Robin series. I hope we get to see a regular Robin monthly title in '93; the character deserves more than occasional miniseries and supporting roles.

Robin III: Cry of the Huntress *is off to a terrific start. If it continues at this pace, and there is every indication that it will, then this will be the best* ***Robin*** *mini-series to date.*



Marvel fans who think they have a handle on this mutant thing should take a look at the new Epic series ***Mutatis.*** This three-issue limited series by Andy Lanning, Dan Abnett, and John Higgins presents a much less positive image of mutations...

Mutatis is a cross between John Carpenter's ***The Thing*** and ***D.O.A.*** Former officer Lyle Clane is infected with a deadly virus known as mutatis—a virus that causes those it infects to metamorphose into hideous, oozing, amorphous masses of tissue that are motivated by a desire to survive and spread their infection (yep, that's the ***Thing*** angle). Clane is walking dead; the virus will kill him in less than twenty-four hours—but here the plot veers away from the standard ***D.O.A.*** dead-man-seeking-vengeance motif. Clane has one chance for survival—if he can track down the other infected victims of Mutatis. If he can do sterilize them, the man responsible for the virus will cure him. If not...

Mutatis depends on pacing to make the story work. Clane has only twenty-four hours, so every minute counts. The book captures that feel; the action is fast-paced, almost frantic, as Clane does what he must for his own survival...and for the survival of the human race, for if Mutatis is allowed to spread unchecked, no one is safe. Since I was familiar with Abnett and Lanning only from their Marvel UK superhero work, I wasn't sure how adept they were at this sort of suspense; I'm pleased to report that they pull it off quite well. Artistically, John Higgins is up to the challenge of telling a story that relies more on mood than on superheroic posturing; visually, the end result looks like it would be right at home in a DC Vertigo title.

When you described ***Mutatis*** *as* ***The Thing*** meets ***D.O.A.,*** *I was a bit confused, but after reading the book, I can only agree. I also agree with something else that you've already said: the pacing is what makes this book work. If the book were paced a little more slowly, then the end result would be quite different. In fact, if this had been done as a book for DC's Vertigo line the pacing might have been done more slowly so that the philosophy of what has happened could be fully explored and exploited; instead, what* ***Mutatis*** *most closely resembles is a hard-core mystery novel in the genre of a Mickey Spillane—with John Carpenter's* ***The Thing*** *thrown in for good measure. Couldn't you have pictured the main character, who narrates the entire story from his own personal perspective, as the product of a slightly more twisted Mickey Spillane? The entire time I was reading this, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was reading a hard-boiled mystery...*

Mutatis isn't a major fall crossover event or a no-holds-barred superhero saga; it's just a very solid, hard-edged suspense story that is much more cinematic than the average comic. But if you're getting a bit tired of major fall crossover crossover events and no-holds-barred superhero sagas, you'll find it be a refreshing change.

The popularity of vampires seems to go in stages. Some years there will be very little new material—in book, movie, or comic form—while other years will see a deluge of new bloodsuckers. We are in a deluge year...

Perhaps the most eagerly awaited vampire project of the past decade will be unearthed in November: Francis Ford Coppola's version of ***Bram Stoker's Dracula.*** *If you don't want to wait for the film, though, then you should take a look at the comics adaptation by the team of Roy Thomas and Mike Mignola. The adaptation is the first release from the new Topps Comics division of the Topps trading card company—and it is a beautiful beginning.*

This is probably the most faithful adaptation of the classic vampire tale ever brought to screen—or, in this case, to the comic book page. Roy Thomas has done a good job of transferring the mood and the feel of the story into the language of the comic.

I was quite taken with the interpretation of Dracula presented here—although I have to admit that I'm not that fond of the interpretation of Dracula himself (that's no fault of Mignola's, since he's working from film images). Nevertheless, this is a visually stunning work that captures the gothic melodrama of Dracula in an extremely foreboding

way.

Thomas is an old master at the art of comic storytelling, so he seems very natural in his handling of this tale. Stoker's character has seen so many incarnation in the comics field alone that it is difficult to get excited about the idea of reading yet another version of the tale, but this adaptation breathes a new life into the character; the adaptation is so faithful to the original that it is easy to get caught up in the interactions of the characters, and feel as though it were all new again.

I have never envied the role of the writer in adapting a film to comics; he seems to be more editor than writer, deciding which core scenes and lines of dialogue must be left in after the chaff is stripped away. If he cuts too much, or in the wrong places, the unity of the film is lost. Thankfully, Topps has made Roy Thomas's job much easier by giving him a great deal of space in which to work; since this is a four-issue adaptation, he can take a more deliberate pace, building each scene rather than rushing through the highlights in 48 or 64 pages. ***Dracula*** certainly benefits from the extra space...and the reader benefits as well, since he gets to admire twice as much Mike Mignola artwork as he would normally see in a 48 or 64 page adaptation.

As much as I enjoyed reading this adaptation, I too have to admit that the most captivating aspect of the book is the artwork. There are few artists working in comics today who can match Mike Mignola in terms of dynamic visual impact. Every panel of this book seems alive with feeling and sensation. Mignola's use of large areas of black helps to create an overwhelming sense of dread throughout the entire book, that lends to the sensation of impending horror.

Mignola also manages to adapt the story without grinding narration to a halt with out-of-place artographed photo-refererenced "portraits" of the cast. So many film adaptations feature incongruous over-referenced photo-tracings like this that not only interrept the narration but also break the visual flow of the book; Mignola refuses to compromise his style in this manner. Even when he does capture the appearances of members of the cast, he does so in his own style.

BLAM BLAM!
SHA-KOOM!
BLAM BLAM!
GYAAAH!
I'M THE BOGG HERE! THIS IS MY CITY! AND WHAT I WANT-- BOGG!
STUPID MOVIE, YOU MOON-FACED BOG OF A BITCH! THIS IS
The Spectre

Dracula is not strictly a tale of horror, though, and Mignola is able to convey the sense of tragedy and romance that peroades this book with equal skill. Mignola's skill as a comic artist has grown almost exponentially over the years—and specifically in the last two or three—to the point where he can be counted among the top names in the industry. Hard to believe from a guy who started on ***Rocket Raccoon***, huh?

The true test of the success of Francis Ford Coppola's ***Dracula*** *will be seen in the theaters in November. Comic fans, however, will get to taste some of what is to come weeks before the film's scheduled release, and despite the uncertainty of what the film may hold, the comic is well worth your attention.*

The Spectre has a schizophrenic comic book history; at various times, writers have presented him as a vengeful spirit of Danté-esque justice or as a benevolent cosmically-powered force of good. I'll confess that I grew tired of the benevolent cosmic force angle after a couple of stories; there's simply no challenge when the hero possesses infinite powers. At the same time, I wasn't wholly comfortable with the merciless avenger approach, because it was too radical a departure from the Spectre that we'd already come to know; after all, Spectre had at various times in his history been a "team player," and I couldn't accept this merciless avenger as being willing to work with anyone...or as needing to...

I agree that seeing ***The Spectre*** *work with a team like the Justice Society is a little odd, but I still think he can be used in a "team player" sense—in much the same way that Batman can be used in a team player sense. Alan Moore used the Spectre exceptionally well in some of his* ***Swamp Thing*** *stories. I do agree that The Spectre works best alone, though—again, much the same as Batman does. I think it is important that all of these past incarnations of a character be viewed with equal amount of respect.*

The Spectre #1 makes it clear that John Ostrander is familiar with The Spectre's history; he alludes to details of the hero's past frequently, thereby assuring readers that this isn't one of those "everything-you-thought-you-knew-is-wrong" revisionist his-

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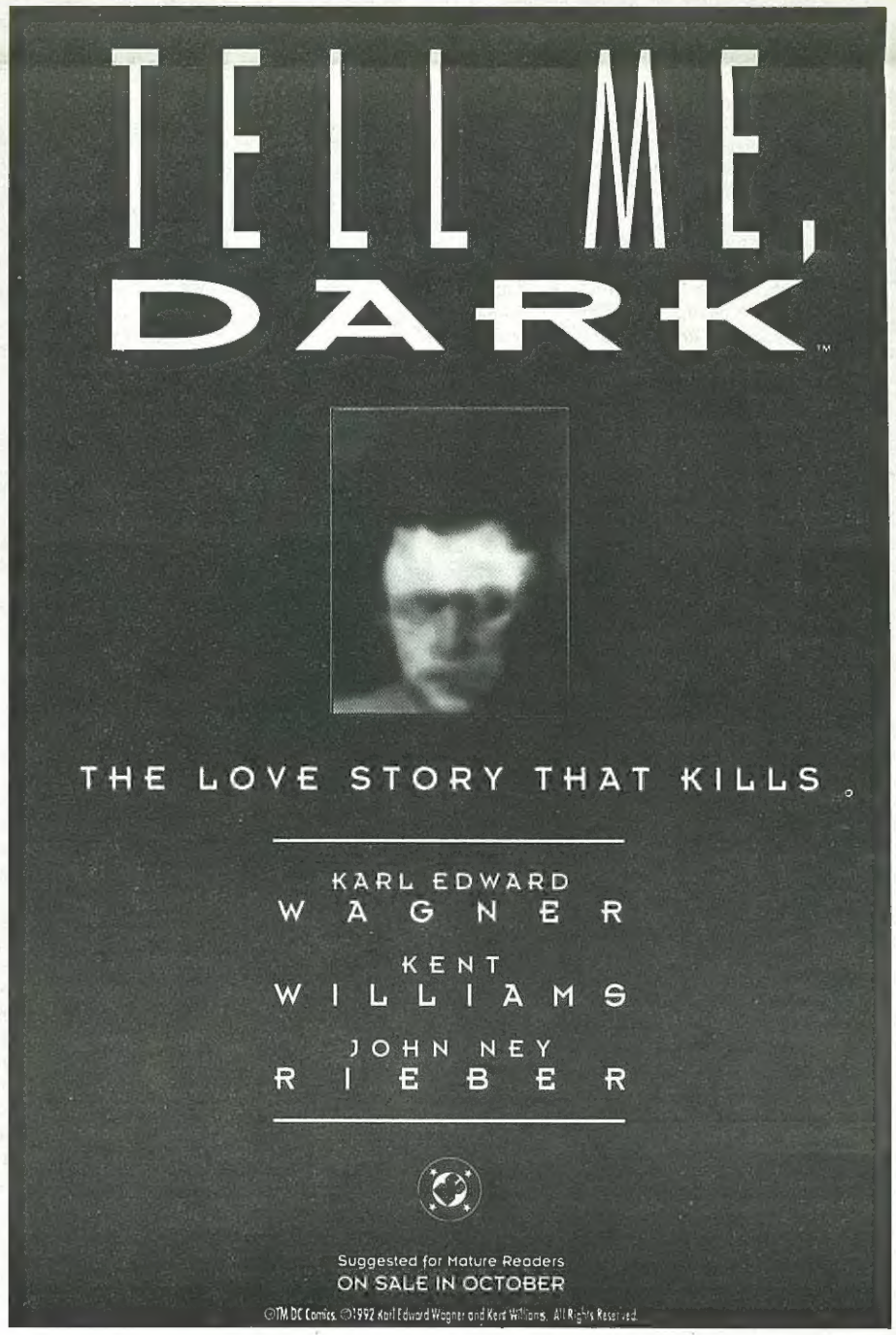
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tories. At the same time, he somehow manages to blend both extremes of The Spectre's history into a powerful amalgam that is vengeful without being merciless, and powerful without being omnipotent.

I was first introduced to The Spectre during the controversial Michael Fleischer "avenging-spirit" stories, and then later found out about his earlier incarnations. So, I have to admit that I found this version of The Spectre to be much more in line with my first impression of the character—that of the "avenging-spirit." However, I'm now much older than I was when those stories first appeared, and I can recognize them as being somewhat shallow in their motivation— and I can also say that John Ostrander also knew to avoid that pitfall of lack of motivation. This time, The Spectre acts with a reason, and Jake Corrigan is more directly involved in the story.

Jake Corrigan has always been directly involved with the Spectre's story; I think I know what you mean, though, since Corrigan's death is the Spectre's primary motivating force, whereas in the past Corrigan was little more than a human "costume" that the Spectre donned.

The Spectre's origin is born from a thirst for revenge; whereas Bruce Wayne became Batman because he couldn't let go of the horror of seeing his own parents murdered, Jake Corrigan became the Spectre because he couldn't let go of the horror of seeing himself murdered. His thirst for revenge against everything evil outlived him; now he returns to Earth both as Corrigan and as a sepulchral avenger, a scale-balancing force of cosmic justice intent upon making criminals understand the essence of their crimes.

I know that a lot of you are going to latch onto a copy of ***The Spectre #1*** because of the glow-in-the-dark cover, or because of the darker, more moody artwork by Tom Mandrake. I hope that everyone takes the time to read the book as well; it's surprisingly thought provoking, and its Old Testament view of justice seems to be almost archetypal to comics.

*There have been two Tarzan mini-series from Malibu already—**Tarzan the Warrior*** and ***Love, Lies, and the Lost City**. Both of these series have been excellent and well worth finding if you haven't already tried them. These two series were not the ones originally intended to introduce Malibu's Tarzan, though; that privilege belongs to **Tarzan: The Beckoning**. Alas, for various reasons it was delayed. If those other two series are so good, then why did they want to start with this one? After reading **Tarzan: The Beckoning**, I know why.*

***Tarzan: The Beckoning** is an all new seven issue mini-series written and drawn by Tom Yeates (with some writing help from story editor Henning Kure) and it is excellent. This story begins in a real world very consistent with the world of ERB's Tarzan. First off—as has been somewhat explained in the other series—according to this book, Tarzan is a real person who was fictionalized by Edgar Rice Burroughs; some of the things that Burroughs wrote were correct, but others were very false indeed. In fact, at several points in this book, the fictional Tarzan is made fun of by either passers by or in old movies on the television.*

This was a touch that I thought was inspired; it's reminiscent of those early Marvel Comics, when the Fantastic Four would sit around reading issues of Marvel's FF title and laughing about the ludicrous nature of the book. The world has always preferred to simplify and categorize, so it's only natural that Tarzan would be reduced to a two-syllable "ape-man" description. Think how many real human beings in our world have been so stereotyped...

Yeates light touch adds that flavor of "yeah, these are silly, but don't you love them?" to the background of the story, which is refreshing. It's also a good thing considering the other side of the story...

Yeates has Tarzan confront the real-life tragedy of ivory poaching...and he does so in a fairly ruthless manner. Tarzan is terrorizing a chain of stores dealing in illegal ivory; the stores themselves don't really want to carry the merchandise, but the unscrupulous owner of the import firm forces them to do so through extortion. To further complicate matters, Phoon has hired a mercenary to track down the man responsible for the destruction and kill him—a mercenary who just happens to idolize Tarzan (the fictionalized version of him ,anyway).

There is another layer to the story though—one that touches upon African folklore. The spider-man—no relation to that other character—is an ancient African trickster who wants to leave the Earth but finds that he lacks the power, so he wants to enlist Tarzan's aid to help him get back home—whether Tarzan wants to help him or not. Yeates brings all of these factors together in a very pulp-oriented manner, and with very definite tips to Burroughs own stories—Tarzan crawling up on the table and howling at dinner is a scene that I distinctly remember—to fashion a very lush story.

A typical Edgar Rice Burroughs Tarzan story resembled loose strings that initially seemed to run parallel to one another. As the reader progressed through the story,though, he saw that the strings gradually bent towards one another and wrapped themselves together into a single fiber. That's just the structure that Yeates is using here; his plot-strings seem unrelated, but readers can already see how they'll interweave in the next few issues.

The art by Yeates only furthers the overall lushness of the book. Yeates uses a fine line hatching style that creates a very soft and rich feel to the art. Yeates' art doesn't have the glitz that has become so popular in recent years; instead, it relies upon a visual draw; it creates an image that moves the eye further into the art and gives each page a specific depth.

Tarzan: The Beckoning will delight Tarzan fans, but it will also delight anyone who likes a well crafted tale told in a beautiful manner.

THUNK!
The Arrow
™ & ©1992 ERB, Inc.
Tarzan: The Beckoning
As the first rays of the ascending moon pierce the forest clearing... the females start to beat the earthen drum...
And here, under the ghost full moon, Kerchak raises his great voice in a fearful roaring SCREAM...
LONG LIVE DOOM!
©1992 Malibu Graphics
TO BE CONTINUED

When I was much younger, I used to use a stainless steel trashcan lid as a substitute Captain America shield; no matter how much I practiced, though, I never could get it to ricochet with a reverberating clang! Instead, I got it to crumple with a disappointing crunch. Several gashed tree-trunks and two trash-can lids later, I realized that there was more to this superhero shield stuff than I comprehended, so I switched to a bow and arrow.

Thankfully, my luck was much better with the bow and arrow than with the trash can lid; I more often than not hit the target, although the bullseye had an uncanny ability to repel my arrows. Still, I managed to miss the target occasionally, and on more than one occasion I observed the shaft of my arrow protruding from objects that would have been much more useful sans arrow-holes...

So what's the point of this childhood reminiscence confirming that Green Arrow has nothing to fear from me? I'm getting to it...

The Arrow, the latest one-shot spin-off from Malibu's The Protectors, presents a superhero who has at least one thing in common with me—he misses occasionally. When I missed, though, lawn furniture was my primary casualty; when The Arrow misses, people suffer...and sometimes die.

If my analogy trivializes the situation, that's not my intent; Roland Mann has presented a very emotional, very visceral story of a hero who has failed more than once—and who fears that he may fail again. Unlike the world of most comics, wherein costumed heroes always hit the target and possess every skill necessary for the completion of their duties, The Arrow is fallible. That's why he finally gave up the costume.

*Well, I too was the terror of many an inanimate object in my youth with my trusty bow and far-flung arrows, so I can relate to both of you. Being perfect isn't easy; heck, some would argue that it isn't possible, which is one of the things that is most appealing about Mann's story—everyone can relate. There have been times that everyone wanted to do the perfect thing, but something happened to ruin it. As you point out, in The Arrow's case that means bloodshed—but the same principle applies, just on a grander scale. **The Arrow** proves the one quality that every hero needs, if they are going to be true heroes—the ability to overcome adversity and self doubt, and accomplish the task that no one else could.*

Mann's story is ultimately a rite of passage, although the Arrow seems a bit old to be undergoing such a ritual. Then again, though, aren't many comic book costumed heroes adolescent personalities in adult bodies? The Arrow certainly is; by the end of the story, however, Mann makes him realize that while he isn't perfect, he's also better than almost anyone else at the job of battling costumed villains.

Lee Moder, the artist of ***The Arrow,*** seems more than a little influenced by Neal Adams' artwork from two decades ago; thankfully, he is capable of visually acknowledging his influences without resorting to panel after panel of artistic swipes. Moder's work here is impressive; I hope he has the opportunity to illustrate another Protectors book very soon.

The Arrow is the second Protectors-related one-shot that I've thoroughly enjoyed; I'm glad to report that Malibu's entry into the superhero field has resulted in comics that are just as pleasant to read as they are to look at.

Since it is getting close to Halloween, looking at hor-

ror in comics probably isn't a bad idea. Good thing we've gotten to review ***Dracula, The Spectre,*** *and now* ***Fear,*** *the bookshelf format comic starring Ghost Rider and Captain America.*

I was a bit trepidatious when I heard about this project; I can't think of two heroes in the Marvel Universe who seem much more incongruous than Captain America and Ghost Rider. I guess, then, that it's a tribute to Mackie and Week's ability that I overcame that initial reaction and managed to enjoy the story...even though I still marvel that the duo pulled it off, considering he different natures of these two characters.

Ghost Rider is a natural for Halloween adventures—he does having a flaming skull for a head, after all. Using the Scarecrow as the villain even makes perfect sense, since there is a degree of horror associated with scarecrows. Captain America doesn't make as much sense; for a Fourth of July story, sure, but Halloween? And as you say, what makes even less sense is how they got this thing to work so well.

Writer Howard Mackie and artist Lee Weeks have turned in a top-notch job on this book. What I got to review from was an unfinished copy of the book—but even so, I knew that I wanted the rest.

The Scarecrow is used as a malevolent, destructive, and almost purely evil force in this book, and I guess that is what makes Captain America's role so necessary. Cap is a force of pure good to counter this evil man's actions—and believe me, the Scarecrow's actions are downright evil.

The Ghost RIder is the balance; he is somewhere between pure good and evil, portrayed and seen as both by those around him—and not even sure on which side he is himself. Danny Ketch isn't sure anyway, but he does know that there are things that he has to do, and he can't do them without the Ghost Rider's help.

The art by Lee Weeks is nothing short of gorgeous. By the end of his run on ***Daredevil,*** *Weeks had matured into an artist capable of handling the most mundane matter in the most exciting manner, and if you were to give him something action oriented, he would dazzle. That's what Weeks does in* ***Fear;*** *he dazzles the reader. Weeks is able to convey as much information through body language and facial expression as the writer is through words on this book.*

I haven't seen a better portrayal of Captain America since Jack Kirby ended his first Silver Age run on the character. Weeks is a natural for Cap; I'd love to see him take on the monthly ***Captain America*** and restore some of its lost glory.

Weeks also draws one of the more menacing Ghost RIders I've ever seen.

In any case, don't be afraid to give ***Fear*** *a try. It's a strong story and some of the best art you're going to find in a comic this month. Furthermore, it's near Halloween and you need to read something with a little bit of fear in it, don't you think?*

In the past two months, we've taken a look at Marvel's first two 2099 titles; one of them was an original character, while the other had only the most marginal of tie-ins with his namesake. Marvel continuity fans are going to be very pleased to hear that the third 2099 title, ***Doom 2099,*** is much more closely related to the Marvel Universe of today...or so it seems...

The Doom of 2099 is the same Doom that we know today—or at least he claims to be. The current ruler of Latveria, Tiger Wylde, has his doubts; after all, as he points out, this current Doom is quite young, quite unscarred, and seems to be a surprisingly easy conquest for Wylde. Nevertheless, he claims that he is the one and only Doom...and in spite of the brutal defeat he suffers at Wylde's hands, he is unwilling to give up his struggle to regain control of Latveria once again.

John Francis Moore has constructed an enigmatic tale that owes a great deal to the original Doom legend; in the world of 2099, though, Doom's scarring at the hands of his enemy is intentional, not imagined, and it's easy for the reader to find himself siding with Doom in the struggle. In some ways, Moore has produced a series reminiscent of the short-lived Dr. Doom solo stories of the early 1970's; while Doom retains the characteristics that make him such an archetypal Marvel villain, he is forced into situations wherein his actions seem somehow non-villainous by comparison.

It was the mystery that hooked me I did side with Doom—but I think a lot of that had to do with the fact that this is one of the baddest of the bad-guys from the comics I grew up on, and I didn't want some two-bit high-tech Godfather beating-up my bad guy. Then I realized that the only reason I felt that way was because I thought that this might actually be the Dr. Doom I grew up with, despite all of the evidence to the contrary. So more than anything else, it was the mystery of this characters identity that hooked me, and will keep me coming back for more.

Pat Broderick's artwork looks better here than it has in years; Broderick has developed a more detailed, controlled style that works quite well visually. He tells a story quite well, but he also manages to work in the illustrative flourishes that wow most comic fans. Broderick's style is evident throughout, but the finishing style is reminiscent of Art Adams—and it's a great combination.

Marvel fans who have been looking for a solid interrelationship between the modern Marvel Universe and the Marvel Universe of 2099 will find it in the pages of Doom 2099—and they'll also find a thought-provoking adventure story that'll hook them from the opening pages...

A Late Reminder

Many, many months ago, when First Comics was still actively producing books, we took a look at the then-imminent ***Blue Witch of Oz.*** Well, a lot has changed since then—and First is no longer actively producing any books at all—but ***The Blue Witch of Oz*** is once again ready for release, this time from Dark Horse Comics. While we're too short on space to actually review the book in these pages, let me assure you that this is Eric Shanower's best Oz story to date; his expansions on L. Frank Baum's creations are as entertaining and faithful to the original as Carl Barks' are to Walt Disney's vision of Donald Duck. If you think that the film version of Oz is all there is (and believe me, it's anemic and insipid compared to the original vision of Oz as found in the books—and I *like* the film!), then you owe it to yourself to find out just how fantastic and complex the world of Oz truly is. Give ***The Blue Witch of Oz*** a try—and once you do, you'll want to track down the earlier Shanower Oz novels, which Dark Horse also intends to make available.

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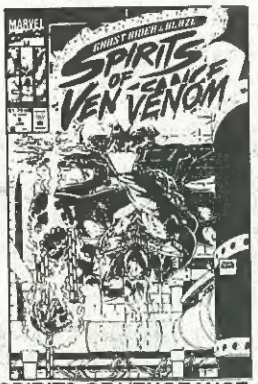

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